

Congressional Hearing: “Human Rights in China: Improving or Deteriorating Conditions?”

The Committee on International Relations Subcommittee on Africa,
Global Human Rights and International Operations
Wednesday, April 19, 2006

Testimony of Mr. Lu Decheng, Former Political Prisoner and Tiananmen Square Protestor

Imprisonment for Defacing Mao’s Portrait

I was one of three people who “defaced” the portrait of Mao Zedong during the 1989 democracy movement at Tiananmen Square. Along with Yu Zhijian and Yu Dongyue, I threw paint-filled eggs at the portrait of Mao. The three of us were charged with “counterrevolutionary sabotage, propaganda and incitement”, and we were all sentenced to lengthy prison terms. An employee of a bus company at the time, I was sentenced to 16 years in prison. Yu Zhijian, an elementary school teacher, was sentenced to life in prison. Yu Dongyue, a fine arts editor with Liuyang News in Hunan, was sentenced to 20 years in prison.

I served over nine years of a 16-year jail term before being paroled early in 1998. I fled through Burma to Thailand in November 2004. I left Thailand for Canada on April 11, 2006 under a resettlement program run by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Yu Zhijian was freed in 2005, but in March 2006, he was arrested again for his pro-democracy activities. In March 2006, Yu Dongyue was released on probation after serving 16 years in prison, but he was found to be severely mentally ill. His family members have said that Yu cannot recognize them, and that he speaks unintelligibly.

On the night of May 22, 1989, the three of us came up with the idea of making a bold gesture. Our target was the huge portrait of Mao Zedong that hangs over the entrance to the Forbidden City. On May 23, we loaded empty eggshells with red, blue and yellow paint and hurled them at the portrait, the highest symbol of prestige of the Communist Party and its political system. Splatters of paint landed on the face and shirt of the founder of the People’s Republic of China. We also hung two banners over the main arch of the Tiananmen Gate. One banner proclaimed “The 5,000-year history of autocracy is over,” and the other said, “The personality cult has ended forever.”

We were handed over to national security police by the student command on the Square, after which we received our harsh punishments from the government. Our act of protest symbolized a strong political declaration that China has no way of taking even a single step towards freedom without first getting rid of Mao.